

what else can i say? we both came into the sixties with visions. there's been more poetry and poetry magazines put out in the last 10 years whatever the statistic is, that says a lot. a very few lasted the decade, and most of the ones that lasted and are around today died with their second issue. THE OUTSIDER whatever else it did, let poets know that there was a place to go to, away from the footnotes and tea-parties, away from the trumpets. it stood there, what it was, and it pointed in directions even further away.

so what are you gonna do. people sometimes want to see results. well, jon, i'm working on it. Bukowski you don't have to worry about. i'm not really sure why i'm writing this, but it's not because i feel i owe you something. if i do, the poems will have to take care of that. but i don't represent anybody else but myself, and i've told what i know about THE OUTSIDER, one of the ways i know how to tell it, and i hope it's enough. if not, it won't make such a very big difference. i'm not in this for the tombstone, either.

-- marcus grapes 12/17/71

#### ALL PRICKLES -- NO PETALS

Blue, murderer -- he'd got excited in his first holdup and pulled the trigger -- was sitting on the toilet bowl darning socks. There had been another "outside" show in Chapel and in one of the acts two rope-legged Akron blondes had put on a dance with few clothes on. After the show we had gone straight to the dining room and from there to the cells.

Blue's needle went in, came out, and Blue's lips opened, shut. In ... opened ... out ... shut.... Bite, and another knot.

"Ungth," he grunted, and I got up and stood in front of the cell door. It was still light out, and I stood and looked out at the rock garden five tier-stories down. I felt no bodily hurt -- the legs, you know -- no empty nausea of loneliness, just a curious, half-hearted resentment. I was too much the old-timer to fill up at the throat any more.

"Ungth," grunted Blue, and I went back and sat down on the lower bunk again. I looked over at Blue and smiled.

"Those bitches," I said.

"Hanh?" said Blue and looked up.

"At the show," I said. "Those rope-legged bitches."

Blue's eyes narrowed.

"What are you trying to do, newcomer," I laughed, "look tough?"

"Bitches?"

"All right," I said, "you name them."

I rolled a cigarette, picked up a tattered Guy de Maupassant and settled my shoulders back against the wall. The small bulb over the washbowl mirror flickered. The single faucet dripped. I opened the book, but instead of reading I listened indifferently to a half-dozen loud-mouths yelling over the ranges.

Tinker Dominick, with his nerve-wracking baby drawl: "Ja see me clap? Naaaw, and ya never will!" (Say, monkey, ya clapped every time!) "Who said that?" (I said it. Warden Lawes, in 6 on 3. Wanna come down?) "Nuts to you, fresh guy." (Yore mammy!) "Okay, Fritz, I'll mammy you tomorra -- in the yard." (Fritz'll mammy yer sister, Tinker Baby.) "Who said that?" (Tinker clapped every time.) "Yeah? I'll clap your mouth shet, Pony Boy." (Clap yer mammy, Tinker Baby.)

"What-a they tawken about?" said Blue.

"Playing the dozens," I said. "Putting each other's relatives in the grease."

"Bout clappen, I mean."

"Those bitches," I said.

"Hanh?"

In the center of the back square of stone wall between the upper and lower bunks I'd pasted a magazine clipping of a half-naked girl. I'd named her Darling. "Darling," I'd say, "I love you." I'd come into the cell from work each evening and glance at her. I'd look up from a book or from my writing and gaze at her. It was all in fun --

it wasn't the girl, it was just girl. Do you understand? It wasn't this girl in the picture I loved, or craved. It was a girl-body, the thought of girl. She was the one big thing I had to forget -- and didn't want to forget. Darling, I love you. You had to have someone to say that to, and I didn't go for punks. See?

I stepped on a bedbug and said, "They'll be talking about them for two weeks. That's all they think about."

"What?"

"Bitches."

Blue bent to his darning and I noticed his fingers moved a little faster. "The wanst sung Stormy Weather," he said.

"What about her?"

"She was just a kid," he said. "She wasen no bitch."

"No?" I laid the book down and leaned on it.

"How she opened her mouth," said Blue. He looked up. "When she said 'wea-a-ther' -- how she kinda bit onner tongue. Ye could just see the tip of her tongue an the bottom of her top teeth."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Loreen did at once."

"When was that?"

"Oh, one night."

"Go on."

Blue looked through the bars in the cell window. He had brown eyes and short-clipped sandy-colored hair. He was short, big-necked and broad-shouldered. "I don't like to tawk about it," he said.

"No?"

"But at gurl at the show...." He plied his needle again. "She come here offen?"

"Oh. about every three months."

He glanced up. "Yeah?"



"Let's talk about something else, Blue," I said.

"Bout what?"

"I'd just as soon read," I said. I read a few lines and said, "About what? Anything, except girls."

"Always comes back tume."

"Well, it has to stop," I said. "We just won't let it this time. O.K.?"

Blue smiled. "That pitcher on the wall," he said.

"What about it?"

"You're always sayen don't come back tume, but you're always looken at it."

"This morning," I said, "you were telling me about your father-in-law dying. You were downstairs when you got a feeling ...."

"Yeah," said Blue, tying a knot in a fresh needleful of thread and transfixing Darling from the corner of his left eye, "I was downstairs helpen Sissy with her arithmetic. Sissy was Loreen's sister."

"You'd been married eight months then?"

"Yeah," said Blue. "I was tellen Sissy somethen when I got this feelen I ought to go upstairs. So I went up."

"You went up."

"Yeah, I went up. Well, the old man'd always had a wheezy sound niz nose, a sneezle-like sound, like this: Ssssssch-ssssschtt! But when I went up and looked in I didn't hear a thing. I looked at him a minnit, then I looked at Loreen. She was curled up in a chair, sleepen. She was eight monts gone, ye know. I looked at her a minnit, then I looked back at the old man. I lissened again -- nope. I leant forward, lissened -- nope. I kept looken ...."

"What'd he die from?"

"Die? Oh," said Blue, "Dropsy'n stummick ulcers. All he could eat was poached eggs and broth. Coulden sleep neither." He smiled. "Looken at the pitcher?"

"No," I said, "looking through it. Go on."

"Coulden drink water ner milk."

"No?"

"He'd drunk too much likker, I guess, and he'd been outa work two years when I first met him. That's when I met Loreen."

"Keep chewing on the old man."

"He sure was a good old man," said Blue, glancing up at Darling on the wall. "Treated me swell. I remember one night we come in from a show -- Loreen and me. She had a habita changen her dress ...."

"Is this about the old man?"

"Yeah. The old man liked ta tawk to me and when we come in he was out with the old lady -- in the kitchen."

"This is getting exciting," I said.

"Getten what? -- oh! Well," said Blue, "Loreen went in the bedroom to hang up her coat'n hat. I went to the kitchen and when Loreen come in she still had her outside dress on. The old lady looked up and said, 'Why dontcha change your dress, Loreen?' Never thinken, Loreen started loosnen her dress right there. The old lady was fixen coffee and she'd turned back to the stove, but the old man was looken right at her. Just then the old lady turned back. She looked at Loreen and said, 'Whata you dune, Loreen?' Loreen looked up and seen me. She turned red as a beet and the old man started laffen his fool head off. He sure was a good old man."

"She didn't know you were there?"

"Yeah, she knew I was there, but she'd forgot all about me. She was pretty young and ye know how habits are. I was standen near the sink and the old man was sitten by the stove. She just didnen stop to think, I guess." She started openen her dress, and as luk'd have it she was wearen a brazier."

"A what?"

"Round her bress. She didnen have much -- beun only fourteen, ye know."

"You talking about Sissy?"

"Loreen."

"Fourteen?"

"Yeah."

"Hunh. How far'd she get?"

"Oh, just down the front aways ... happened she seen me in time."

"Fourteen?"

"Yeah."

"What'd she do then?"

"Well," said Blue, pointing with the needle, "the kitchen was right here, see, and the bedroom was here. All she hada do was run through this door, see, and she was in the hall. Norder to get to her bedroom she hada go in the hall here -- then to her right two or three steps -- to her right again here, see, and right in her bedroom door."

"Go on."

"Well, when she got back she was still red. She says, 'Gee, Blueby, I forgot all aboutja!'"

"Blueby?"

"Yeah."

I picked up the book again. The yelling over the ranges had died down a bit and I glanced up at Darling and said, "Engaged to her then?"

"No -- just goen together." He stood up, stretched, coughed, and spit into the toilet. "Was like this," he said, sitting down again, "I was cumen home from work one day. I was worken at the Euclid Steel Foundry, and I was cumen long in onea those boxcars."

"Be explicit."

"What?"

"What kind of boxcars?"

"Oh, ye know, dinkies. I was in the back when I seen her wave. I thought she was waven at me so natcherly I waved back. She ...."

"This is all about the old man!"



"She was so sweeten little," said Blue, smiling, "I just couldn't help waven. But it turned out she was waven at a guy standen next to me."

"The old man?"

"Yeah. I seen him wave, and then he turned to me and said, 'That's my dotter.' Then he said, 'How long you been waven at her?' 'Why,' I says, 'this is the first time I ever seen her.' 'Oh, yeah?' he says. 'Yeah,' I says, 'what of it?' 'This of it,' he says, 'when young men wave at young gurls, it means somethen. Who are you?'"

"Why didn't you crack him one?"

"Too old," said Blue, picking up another sock. "And he looked sickn weak -- like starved. 'Forget it, fella,' I says, and we got to tawken. I ast him wasen he gotten off, and he told me no he was goen on to the Fisher Body. He told me he'd been outa work two years and that he'd been riden back and forth between the Euclid Steel Foundry and the Fisher Body six monts tryen to get a job. He told me the dinkie conductor knew him and let him ride free. He said his dotter'd stand on the corner and wave at him and that when he seen me wave he thought maybe I was the reason she'd started cumen there. I told him again I'd never noticed her before, nor him neither, and I ast him how his family lived. The Relief gave them a slip each two weeks, but wasen enough. They was four in the family and they just lived, he said."

"So you met the girl?"

"Well," said Blue, "was like this. My shiff quit at four and each day after that, when I rides by, I sees her standen there, and sometimes her old man's on the car and sometimes he ain't -- but she always waves. She'd lift her right hand up," said Blue, his eyes sparkling, "and let her fingers fall up and down -- like this. And she'd always be wearen a red or black dress. She wore them pretty short, and her stockens was youzely rolled down. She youzely wore black stockens and red ribbins but when she wore the red dress she wore black ribbins."

"She was fourteen?"

"Yeah -- fourteen. But legs!"

"Go on."

"Well," said Blue, after a quick glance at Darling, "I gets pretty friendly with the old man. I tries to get

him a job at the foundry, but each time I fix up an interview he gets sick. But he always thanks me and pretty soon he's asten me out to the house. He says they can't fix any good meal but he always has beer and I'm welcome to it anytime. But them half-starved -- I couldnen make up my mind. But I'm lonesome, ye know, no relatives or nothen, cept a brother outa town, and the old man asten each day, and his dotter waven, so finely I gets to thinken -- she's so damn sweet. Her red dress fitted her real tight -- speshly round here," said Blue, demonstrating, "right where her bress was. Course they wasen big, but ...."

"But you finally broke down?"

"How?"

"Went out to the house."

"Yeah, I finely broke down. The old man tells me one day at Loreen -- that was her name -- was tawken about me all the time. He says the minnit she'd come in from school she'd clean up and race down to the corner so's she won't miss me. He tells me different things she says, like, 'Gee, Daddy, ain't he hansum though!' -- things like that. Ye know how young gurls are."

"I know."

"But not from looken at a pitcher," said Blue, smiling.

"Go on," I said.

"Well," he said, getting up again to stretch, cough, and spit, "one night I gets off with him and he intraduces me to her. I shakes hands with her and her hand seems like a little feather -- so small, Jesus! -- just like she was, like a kitten." He held the needle up and looked at it. "Sometimes," he said, looking hard at the needle, "I nearly go nuts -- just thinken about that meeten. Why," he said, "her eyes is like teacups, and her little red lips. When she tawks she holds her head down and plays with her dress, and when I tawk she gazes up at me, and her eyes spread out like -- ye know, like she's taken me all in."

"This is all about the old man," I said.

I could hear Tinker Dominick's nerve-wracking baby drawl. "Sisters, me eye! If they ain't mothern dotter, I'm stirbugs.", (You're stirbugs then.) "Who said that?"

"And when we got to the house," said Blue, "buddy, I'll



never forget that night! Buddy, I was President Rewsvelt that night! They just crawled all over me. Asten me all about my job -- how I liked it, and so on. Interested in me! The old man slaps me on the back and says, 'Damm-it, I'm broke and all outa beer -- would you?' And I says, 'Say, is there a bootlegger round here?' 'Bootlegger!' the old man says. 'There eighta them, why?' 'Here's why,' I says, 'will you run outn get a quart?' 'Sure,' he says, 'one quart?' 'No,' I says, 'two quarts,' and laff! Jesus!" said Blue.

"So what?"

"Well," said Blue, putting his darning aside, "I starts goen with Loreen then. I takes her round to shows and Euclid Beach and one night the old man says to me, 'Blue,' he says, 'Loreen's funny any more. Can't sleep. Can't eat. She's that crazy for ye.' Well, that gets me to thinken, so one night I says, 'Mr. Bobbins, I know Loreen's awful young and all that, but I'd like to marry her and settle down.'"

"What'd he do -- jump on you?"

"Hell, no! He just about yanked my hand off! And when Loreen come in and seen the old lady kissen me she says, 'Why, Blueby!'"

"Blueby!"

"Jesus," said Blue, "she sure looked sweet standen there. Why, ye know, her shoes was only this long. She wore a size three shoe, and she was only four feet six inches tall. I just stood there looken at her. I didn know what to say."

"Say what?"

"Ast her to marry me. I'd never said nothen bout love yet. Course we'd tawked sweet to each other, bout each other's looks, but we'd never kissed or nothen."

"Well, you married her finally -- then what?"

"Yeah -- I ast her, and she looked at the old man and the old lady and the old man says, 'Loreen,' like to give her courage, ye know, and then she looked at me. 'Well,' she says, and shaken -- Jesus! 'Well, I guess yes,' she says -- and gone! Upstairs afflyen. I wanted to fix up a big church wedden," said Blue, "but the old man says no. He says Loreen's pretty young and the police might put a blanket on it. So we gets married in the house two weeks later."

"Just you and the family?"

"Yeah -- and the preacher. The old man'd got one was used to marryen them young. We got to tawken and he told me lotsa kids was getten married in these times. 'We all have to do our part,' he says, and I just stands there looken at him. Jesus, from the way he tawked you'd think I was ...."

"After he left, what?"

"Wait -- when he says man and wife you shoulda seen Loreen -- buddy, I'll never get over at gaze a'hers. She's just standen there, staren straight in fronta her -- with the preacher tellen her about the kiss. I waits a minnit, then I turns her around and kisses her."

"Then what?"

"Well, we had a wedden supper. Then we played cards and drunk likker. Then the preacher went home, and we went to bed. Next day ...."

"You stayed at the house that night?"

"Yeah, from then on -- till Loreen died and I got laid off ... and this." He waved a hand at the four walls.

"Died?"

"Yeah -- with the kid." He leaned back against the wall.

"Hunh."

"Kid was too big," he said. "It died, too." He stared at me, a puzzled, helpless look in his eyes.

"The kid died, too?"

"Yeah, that's the way it goes," said Blue, sitting up again.

"But you stayed there that night," I said.

"When?"

"The night you got married."

"Yeah, they had a room fixed upstairs for us. Buddy it was nice goen up to that room! Loreen went up first, ye know, and when I went up she was just standen there."

"Undressed?"

"No. She was just standen there -- like she was in fronta the preacher. Just gazen, ye know." He began rolling a cigarette, and I glanced up at Darling. "But when I come in she turned quick and started to unfix her hair, let it down, ye know."

"What'd you do?"

"I sits down on the bed and starts taken my shoes off."

"She see you undress?"

"No -- she was looken in the mirror. Her hair was real long and wavy, and she was komen it. Why," said Blue, "she looked like a kid in pigtails. I says to her, 'Well, Loreen, how does it feel to be a wife?' 'A wife?' she says, and that gazen look come back in her eyes. 'Course it seems funny,' she says. 'Just think,' she says, 'yesterday a Miss -- today a Misses.'"

"That's all she said?"

"That's all."

"She wasn't mad?"

"Hell, no."

"Nor frightened?"

"Well, I gets in bed and she starts undressen. Ye know, with her back to me. Course she's bashful and all that, embarrassed, ye know."

"Go on."

"Well, I looks at her and says, 'S'no use beun bashful, honey.'"

"What'd she say?"

"'I ain't bashful,' she says. 'It ain't that.' 'What then?' I says. 'Well --' she says and started to run out. But I jumps up and says, 'Now, honey -- ye needen be scared, honey. I'm your husband. It's all right, honey.'"

"What'd she say?"

"'Yes, it's all right,' she says. 'It's all right by them downstairs.' Then she looked like she wanted to cry, but I kissed her and hugged her and pretty soon she



smiled and crawled in bed. I turned out the light and ... Blue put one hand on his knee and waved the other one, "...so on'n so on."

"So on what?"

"Jesus Christ," he said, "just so on'n so on."

"Listen, Blue," I said, "we've been celling together a month now. I like you, and you like me. We're buddies, aren't we?"

"Sure."

"Well -- so on what?"

"S'too personal."

"To the world," I said, "yes. But just between us two nothing is personal. Of course, if you think I'm a loud-mouth ...."

"She just fainted, that's all."

"Fainted?"

"Ye know," he said, looking down at the floor, "never haven nothen before. Such a little gurl, ye know."

"She was fourteen."

"No -- fifteen then."

"What'd you do?"

"When?"

"You know," I said.

He looked up. After she fainted?"

"Before."

"I was just careful -- natcherly."

"Why?"

"Diden want to hurt her -- see?"

"She yell or anything?"

"No. Just groaned. I told her we'd have to get it over with. We hada get it over with sometime. She sure was brave, all right, Jesus."

"Must've been tough."

"You said it," said Blue. "She says afterwards, 'Buoy, I'm glad that's over with.' When I brought her outa the faint -- 'Whew!' she says. Like that -- 'Whew!' There was tears in her eyes, but the way she smiled -- Christ! I couldn't help lovin' the poor kid. I says, 'Well, honey, I don't think it'll be like that any more.'"

"What'd she say?"

"Nothen. She didn't know. There was no waya her knowen, was there?"

-- Jon Edgar Webb

Gypsy Lou is working on a photo-biography of Jon. The book when finished will sell for \$25. Your advance order will help pay for the printing expenses. Address all orders to: Loujon Press, 340 East 260th St., Euclid, Ohio 44132.

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